
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR Executive Order 72 (00)

ESTABLISHING THE VIRGINIA WETLANDS RESTORATION COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Tidal and non-tidal wetlands are essential to meeting the goals for restoring water quality throughout the Commonwealth. Wetlands play a significant role in protecting water quality by filtering runoff and removing nutrients and sediments, producing dissolved oxygen, moderating flood damage, providing shoreline erosion protection, and acting as recharge points for underground water supplies. Wetlands also provide important habitat for the spawning, nesting, and foraging of wildlife and other living resources that are adapted for the wetlands' unique characteristics.

Since the 1780s, Virginia has lost a significant number of its tidal and non-tidal wetlands. In 1997, recognizing the importance of wetlands, the multi-state Chesapeake Bay Executive Council, of which Virginia is a member, adopted Directive 97-2, Wetlands Protection and Restoration Goals. The Council adopted a commitment for the signatory jurisdictions "to develop strategies to achieve the protection and preservation of the Bay's wetland resources."

The Citizens Wetlands Advisory Committee (CWAC) was convened by the Secretary of Natural Resources to refine goals and strategies and advise the Governor regarding Directive 97-2 and the long-term preservation of wetlands. The CWAC recommended that "the goal of the Commonwealth of Virginia should be to protect, preserve, enhance and create wetlands throughout the Commonwealth and to achieve an increase in the acreage and function of the wetlands. This shall include a policy of no net loss in existing wetlands to be achieved through state and federal regulatory compensation and mitigation requirements for permitted wetland losses. A net gain of wetlands shall be accomplished through voluntary efforts to preserve, restore and create wetland acreage."

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor under Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and under the laws of the Commonwealth, including but not limited to Section 2.1-41.1 of the Code of Virginia, and subject to my continuing and ultimate authority and responsibility to act in such matters, I hereby establish the Virginia Wetlands Restoration Coordinating Committee to accomplish Virginia's goals for wetlands creation and to aid in the voluntary conservation, establishment, and restoration of wetlands in all regions of the Commonwealth.

Virginia Wetlands Restoration Coordinating Committee

The Virginia Wetlands Restoration Coordinating Committee (hereinafter called the Coordinating Committee) will be responsible for encouraging voluntary establishment or restoration of wetlands by private or public landowners throughout the Commonwealth.

A. Composition of the Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee shall operate under the direction of the Secretary of Natural Resources. The director of the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation

shall serve as co-chairs of the Coordinating Committee. The co-chairs of the Coordinating Committee shall have the power to set meetings and make assignments to members of the Coordinating Committee.

The Coordinating Committee shall consist of the agency head/dean or a designee from the following agencies and institutions:

- The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries,
- The Department of Environmental Quality,
- The Department of Conservation and Recreation,
- The Department of Forestry,
- The Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance Department,
- The Marine Resources Commission,
- The Virginia Institute of Marine Science,
- The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services,
- The Department of General Services,
- The Virginia Department of Transportation,
- The Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy,
- The School of Agriculture, Science and Technology at Virginia State University, and
- The College of Natural Resources at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

In addition, staff from the Chesapeake Bay Commission, the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the United States Forest Service, the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and Virginia State University, the Chesapeake Bay Program of the United States Environmental Protection Agency may participate in this program, as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

B. Duties of the Coordinating Committee

The specific duties of the Coordinating Committee are to:

- Promote the voluntary establishment or restoration of wetlands (tidal and non-tidal) by private landowners throughout the Commonwealth.
- Coordinate a comprehensive survey of public lands held by the Commonwealth, as well as lands purchased with state funds but held by private organizations, in search of suitable sites for wetland creation, preservation, and enhancement. Should a GIS approach be taken to address this task, the activity, at first using existing data, should be coordinated through the technical staff for the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF). Responsibility for the development of any new information such as agency property boundaries or identification and ground truthing of existing wetlands should rest with the land-holding agency, and the data should be shared with the VLCF's technical staff as it becomes available.
- Provide the Secretary of Natural Resources with an estimate of the cost and opportunities for funding the restoration or establishment of wetlands on public lands.

Report to me yearly by December 1 through the Secretary regarding the Commonwealth's progress statewide and, in particular, the achievements towards meeting its commitment to restore or establish wetland acreage within the Commonwealth's portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Responsibility of state agencies owning land

State agencies owning, leasing, and/or managing state lands for the public good have the responsibility to be good stewards of that land. As a part of this stewardship, the health and management of wetland areas is critical to ecosystem function and health. I hereby call on all land-holding state agencies, including public institutions of higher education, to demonstrate leadership in this initiative by working to conserve existing wetlands, to restore wetlands and forested streamside buffers, and to create new wetlands on state-owned property throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Specifically, I hereby request all land-holding state agencies and institutions of higher education to participate in the restoration of wetlands by taking the following steps:

1. Identify areas suitable for wetland restoration, establishment, or preservation on the land owned by the agency or institution.
2. Develop measurable indicators for wetland conservation, restoration, and establishment, consistent with the goals of the Coordinating Committee and site-specific conditions, in an agency-specific plan.
3. Identify resources that can be used to establish or restore wetlands on state property.
4. Establish or restore wetlands as appropriate on state lands with the advice of the Coordinating Committee, within the extent of identified resources.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and other agencies that participate in the Coordinating Committee shall provide technical assistance and guidance, within the extent of resources available, to the various land-holding state agencies and institutions which have identified available land for the restoration or establishment of wetlands.

This Executive Order shall become effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect until December 31, 2010, unless amended or rescinded by further Executive Order.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia on this 20th day of October, 2000.

James S. Gilmore, III, Governor

Attest: Secretary of the Commonwealth